

**The Puzzles of Practice: Initiating a collaborative action and research culture within and beyond New Zealand.**

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**Abstract**

In May 2009 a group of researchers in the field of education established the New Zealand Collaborative Action and Research Network (NZCA&RN) hub through the medium of an invited research symposium and associated Blog stimulated by contributions of a leading academic (Somekh 2009a) founding member of the worldwide Collaborative Action Research Network. The principle purpose of the symposium was to establish a networked learning community in the form of “power networking” (Castells 2001), which is designed to change the way we perceive, organize, manage and consume educational research within an Action Research tradition complemented by sympathetic approaches, including Kaupapa Māori. In December 2009 the hub became an Interest Group within NZARE within its annual conference.

Our goal through NZCA&RN was to advance educational research and practice in New Zealand and internationally to map the diverse territory and identify the puzzles, dilemmas and contradictions among communities, practitioners, scholars and academic leaders. The inaugural symposium was our initial effort to map the territory and initiate a hub for our community and we continue this with NZARE.

**The Context**

It was essential in the conception of NZCA&RN that we honour the many ways of knowing and being within New Zealand, which is an increasingly bicultural nation, by opening the symposium with the understanding that Kaupapa Māori and Action Research approaches, while different are not incompatible. In New Zealand, Kaupapa Māori, a discourse of proactive theory and practice, developed into a political consciousness in the late 1980s. It supported the renaissance of Māori cultural aspirations and practices as a philosophical and constructive educational perspective. Numerous commentators (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; L. Smith, 1999) argue that using traditional European research methodology when conducting research related to Māori compromises the validity of the research findings. They suggest that this methodology often looks for the negative rather than providing information necessary to bring about needed change. In their book Bishop and Glynn (1999) challenge the dominance of Western-based traditional individualistic research with Māori and promotes research methodologies that enable the realisation of self-determination and power sharing.

The shared philosophy and vision of Kaupapa Māori incorporates the core value of manaakitanga where teachers “care for the students as culturally located individuals” (Bishop et al., 2007 p.1) and construct learning interactions that acknowledge their differences (Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane,

2007). Effective teaching and research about Māori should promote core values, be holistic, innovative and intergenerational (Airini, 1998, cited in Tuuta et al., 2004). This facilitates a connection to Māori education with “Māori aspirations politically, socially, economically and spiritually” (Smith, 1992, p. 23).

Within both Kaupapa Māori approaches and action research approaches researchers are expected, by their communities to have some form of critical and historical analysis of the role of research in a range of dynamic contexts and sites (Macfarlane, 2009). Thus a metaphor which dominated the proceedings was that of the braided river.

To facilitate this connection of action research-related approaches and Kaupapa Māori approaches, practitioners and leaders in New Zealand were invited to this inaugural research symposium. This followed site visits where these leaders were encouraged to identify others, including emerging researchers and researchers adopting emergent approaches who took us well beyond formal conceptions of action research. The majority who were able to attend submitted abstracts that provided evidence of the range and diversity of their work. The endeavour was underwritten by the University of Canterbury while the participants from more than six participating tertiary institutions sponsored their travel. The organization of the symposium provided significant amounts of time for critical conversation and input from leaders within and beyond New Zealand.

This paper should not be read as merely a narrative of practice but rather as a means of revealing the ways through which the complexities of scholarly practice can emerge. Each discussion group was required to identify the diversity, commonalities and ways forward. The emerging debates and tensions that crystallized with discussion included: empowerment as a problematic term; colonization versus inclusion; the place of being critical; collaboration versus autonomy; perceptions of partnership; the role of digital technologies; and virtual environments as sites for collaborative research and action. We argue that the processes that were employed not only facilitated the mapping of the territory but also can be seen as compass that could guide others who wish to form similar research networks.

### **Networking Participation in Action and Research – The Place of CARN**

Why can networking be a means of advancing action and research for the social good? Foth (2006) characterises networking as the ‘capillary communicative structure’ of communities that enables action researchers to ensure that the open learning and inquiry processes with which they are engaged can spread and flourish. It is not about limiting or controlling options, but allowing them to develop and be in a constant process of conceptualisation and re-conceptualisation. Nonetheless, the impetus to network brings with it some fundamental questions regarding the core and shared values of those who participate if authentic dialogue between the elements is to be nourished and sustained. For, as Elliott (2003:174) has observed:

Most of the collaborative action research I have seen hasn’t been sustained. It’s temporary. The networks created are temporary structures. When the funding runs out they collapse. I am quite interested in how you generate quite radically new kinds of more sustainable permeations across boundaries.

The Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) was originally established as the Classroom Action Research Network by John Elliott and a number of committed colleagues including Bridget Somekh in 1976, in an era where teacher professionalism and its concomitant professional autonomy were being increasingly recognised. These conditions have clearly changed in many countries with such professionalism being resisted and contested by governments and their education authorities as they seek to centralise and be perceived as monopolising power and with it knowledge of what constitutes appropriate educational practices, be they in areas such as curriculum and assessment or the teaching of reading or even managing classrooms. Thus, in the 1990s as a means of broadening

the debate in the context of increasing managerialism, the CARN group in the U.K. widened its focus and changed its name to be inclusive of practitioners in other socially based enterprises such as health and social care and to more comprehensively develop international links. It was seen as possible that sustainability could be built upon an articulated formulation of mutual responsibility whereby those engaged in the enterprise would make visible and transparent their ideals in the public sphere. Many of its principles and practices were to be articulated by means of the journal *Educational Action Research* that brought out its first edition in 1992.

CARN, among other things, sets out to promote recognition:

- that professional learning requires critical inquiry into past, current and future practice;
- that the practitioners themselves should be actively and creatively involved in defining and developing professional practice;
- that they should contribute to the growth of valid professional knowledge and theory; and,
- that all relevant communities including service users, students, clients and so on need to be involved in developing the provision of services. (see CARN web site)

The structure of CARN is such that along with the journal it publishes a regular bulletin and accounts of the proceedings of its annual conferences as well as providing its members with study days. Sustainability has been increased by institutional sponsorship with sets of ten membership subscriptions that also led to improved networking within an institution. As CARN membership became increasingly international, it also evolved to include regional networking within and beyond national boundaries. This paper is about the formation of the most recent regional network or hub, NZCA&RN.

CARN is now a well established as a medium for the generation of participative research that serves the practical ends of social endeavours in the interest of enhancing the social good and even establishing what Elliott (2007:36) sees its great strength in “reinstating social hope for greater justice in society”. Of course, its principles do not belong to it alone. Many have been derived from the work of such inspiring leaders as the late Orlando Fals Borda who, in his reflections on participative action research advised university researchers:

- Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques, but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers;
- Do not trust elitist versions of history and science that respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them;
- Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs and arts for action by and with the research organizations; and
- Do not impose your ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Fals Borda quoted in Grundy 2007:77)

These latter injunctions are of particular relevance in the context of forming a New Zealand CARN hub in recognition of Kaupapa Māori ways of seeing, doing and becoming – literally Māori philosophy. NZCA&RN welcomes wider conceptions of emergent research approaches including practitioner-base research and arts based research, including those who deny their approach may be braided with action research in the flow of collaborative action!

### **Building a CARN Hub, NZCA&RN**

This part of our account is derived from the preface to the proceedings of the inaugural symposium New Zealand Collaborative Action and Research Network (NZCA&RN) chaired by Niki Davis and Bridget Somekh (Davis & Somekh 2009) and published through its Blog

(<http://NZCA&RNresearchsymposium.blogspot.com/2009/05/preface-to-proceedings-of-inaugural.html>).

During Bridget Somekh's stay in New Zealand, as the 2009 Visiting Canterbury Fellow at the University of Canterbury College of Education, she stimulated a movement that made it possible in eight very busy weeks to establish a regional CARN network, similar to the CARN networks already formed in The Netherlands and Spain-Latin America. As we write we have received news that three universities have agreed to sponsor CARN (Canterbury, Otago and Waikato) and thus the final piece is in place for the New Zealand CARN network. As noted earlier organizational sponsorship had evolved as a means of sustaining CARN. It has further evolved so that where three or more sponsoring organisations wish to develop a regional network or hub that is encouraged and can be supported.

Bridget Somekh's experiences elsewhere encouraged her to start to lay the foundation for this regional network before she arrived in New Zealand. As New Zealand has a lot of continuing action research, albeit within pockets, she had made contacts with colleagues leading action research work at the Universities of Otago, Waikato, Victoria and the New Zealand Action Research and Review Centre at Unitec. Bridget described the early process as a personal narrative in her 2009 keynote speech to the annual CARN conference in Athens, Greece, as follows:

One of the first things I did on arrival was to seek out people I could talk to, perhaps visit, to find out about action research in New Zealand. I was not able to find an active constituency. Carol Cardno, who had been an Associate Editor of Educational Action Research from 1994 – 2007, sent me two or three of her publications (e.g. Cardno, 2006), but I was unable to set up a meeting with her or Eileen Piggott-Irvine, who some years ago had coordinated an action research group in New Zealand. It seemed that action research had a history of past activity but was currently dormant. Then, at the University of Canterbury, I found a number of colleagues who were using action research extensively in their teaching, albeit sometimes having to fight their corner at a time when the university was preparing for the PBRF (the Performance Based Research Fund review). I began to work with them in their teaching and found considerable interest in my own action research work among a large number of staff and students.

At the same time that I was seeking out action researchers in New Zealand, I was learning as much as I could about 'Kaupapa Māori research'. Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes this, in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, as one among many indigenous groups, internationally, pursuing 'an indigenous research agenda' (L. T. Smith, 1999). She summarises Graham Smith (p.185) in listing four elements that are essential components of Kaupapa Māori research:

1. It is related to 'being Māori'
2. It is connected to Māori philosophy and principles
3. It takes for granted the validity and legitimacy of Māori, the importance of Māori language and culture; and
4. It is concerned with 'the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well being'.

Going beyond this, Linda Tuhiwai Smith claims that Kaopapa Māori research is a deliberately activist methodology. In what can be seen as an example of an idea travelling in the 'world of flows' and being transformed, she characterises Kaupapa Māori research as 'a "localizing" of the aims of critical theory [as] partly an enactment of what critical theory actually "offered" to oppressed, marginalized and silenced groups.' (Smith, 1999', p.186). She refutes the suggestion that the emancipatory project is over-idealistic or, indeed, that it has to be closely defined in 'western' terms:

The notion of strategic positioning as a deliberate practice is partially an attempt to contain the unevenness and unpredictability, under stress, of people engaged in emancipatory struggles. The broader vision of Kaupapa Māori embraces that sense of strategic positions, of being able to plan, predict and contain, across a number of sites, the engagement in struggle. (Smith, 1999', p.186). ...

Very much to my surprise, about a month into my stay, Niki Davis, the professor at Canterbury with whom I was working closely, suggested that she wanted to explore with me and with colleagues the possibility of establishing a New Zealand regional CARN group. This idea grew remarkably quickly into the Inaugural Symposium of the Collaborative Action Research Network, New Zealand Region <http://nzcarnresearchsymposium.blogspot.com/>. Keynote speakers at the Research Symposium were Angus Macfarlane on the topic, '*Nau te rourou, naku te rourou*. Your food-basket and my food-basket,' and Susan Groundwater-Smith on *Action Research in Education: Considering Practice Architectures*. The attendees included several who were well-placed to launch CARN New Zealand with strong backing from the education research community, including Noeline Alcorn, Emeritus Professor of Education at Waikato, who was Chair of the PBRF Evaluation panel for Education in 2006; and Bev Webber, Publishing and Marketing Manager of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. This was particularly useful during discussions about the acceptability of action research for the PBRF. It became clear that the group was already able to provide significant support to those working in institutions that held traditional views about what counts as quality in educational research.

Throughout the two-day symposium, the metaphor of the 'braided river' was used for the intertwining flows of different research streams within New Zealand. At the CARN Steering Group meeting, at the end of the Symposium, there was considerable discussion of how to use this metaphor to bring together the common interests of various groups, including AR and KMR, in a way that was open and equitable. Linking to CARN provided a supportive framework with a well-established international network, sponsoring partnership, publications, study days and annual conferences. KMR offered political leverage within New Zealand and fitted the aspirations of CARN to support the pursuit of social justice, locally and globally. AR and KMR needed to be equal partners in a joint initiative. One could not be subsumed within the other. The new CARN logo with a river-like spiral design at its heart suggested a way forward with a name that had the semiotic and iconic power to inspire the local New Zealand 'social imaginary':



At the end of the Symposium the proposal to establish The Collaborative Action *and* Research Network, New Zealand regional group was formally accepted and three New Zealand universities (Canterbury, Waikato and Otago) have since become CARN Sponsoring Partners.

In his keynote, Angus Macfarlane suggested that action research often involves processes in which participants:

'are part of a "community of practice" – referred to in Māoridom as a "whanau of interest", a collaborative approach that often employs a blend of Action Research (AR) and Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR) principles.'

<http://nzcarnresearchsymposium.blogspot.com/>

A whanau of interest – an extended family – with shared core beliefs and values, seems to me another way of saying, becoming cousins, Indian-style. New Zealand's NZCA&RN group

shows how CARN is able to support localisation and the growth of 'collective agency' in pursuit of social justice through praxis. Localisation or globalisation? It is not a matter of either, or ... The dynamic nature of action research supports localisation as a powerful force, integral to 'globalisation from below'. (Somekh, personal communication email attachment, 2009b)

While a Visiting Professor at Canterbury, Bridget was invited and personally visited with the Universities of Waikato, Victoria and Otago in Hamilton, Wellington and Dunedin respectively. Visits have been continued by the current NZCA&RN coordinator Niki Davis. The visits have included presentations and discussions of research in education. Bridget introduced the concept of CARN regional networks and continued to steer conversations and offer advice, so that colleagues perceived their agency that would enable them to lead the formation of this network, while also encouraging shared leadership across New Zealand.

It was also essential in the conception of NZCA&RN that we honoured the many ways of knowing and being within New Zealand, which is an increasingly bicultural nation, by opening the symposium with the understanding that Kaupapa Māori (literally Māori philosophy) research and action research approaches, while different, are not incompatible. Within both approaches researchers are expected by their communities to have some form of critical and historical analysis of the role of research in a range of dynamic contexts and sites. As Macfarlane 2009 observed:

Within both approaches researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions that employ them, to have some form of critical and historical analysis of the role of research in a range of dynamic contexts and sites.

Action research is a particular approach to research that aims to improve practice or have a real world application. Individuals involved in the Action Research process are often part of a 'community of practice'. Referred to in Māoridom as a 'whanau of interest', this collaborative approach often employs a blend of Action Research (AR) and Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR) principles.

KMR and AR are often seen to be relating to enhancing the quality of life for selected individuals and groups. The outcomes of the research activities can be useful to a variety of constituents—general and special educators (teachers, administrators, related services personnel), whanau, policy makers, and certainly the students themselves. This presentation will seek to argue that KMR and AR can co-exist - by varying together in patterned ways. (Macfarlane, 2009)

Thus a metaphor which has come to dominate NZCA&RN is that of the braided river, contributed originally by Elaine Mayo and Angus Macfarlane who suggested that our new logo should also show a mountain range in the distance. This metaphor had arisen in a number of ways and covers a range of methodologies for enquiry that often emerge from the context researched. The metaphor of a braided river is used in order reinforce that no one method be subsumed by another and the mountain range suggests the multiple strengths that they bring. This metaphor is supported by powerful images of the braided rivers of New Zealand's South Island, many of which arise in the Southern Alps. This was formally adopted by NZCA&RN at the first meeting of its steering group.

Given this New Zealand's existing strong scholarship and teaching of Action Research particularly in the area of ICT and e-learning and their early partnership at that the intersection (Somekh & Davis, 1997), Bridget Somekh and Niki Davis proposed that digital technologies be a particular strength of NZCA&RN and this was accepted. The inaugural symposium attracted leaders of ICT and e-learning in New Zealand, including Clare Atkins, who leads New Zealand's major educational project in Second Life (<http://slenz.wordpress.com>), and who has proposed an international CARN community within Second Life. We also used digital technologies to increase the reach of our NZCA&RN agency, including the Blog mentioned earlier and a video conference session with Chris Bigum in

Australia to launch the *Handbook of Educational Action Research* (Somekh & Lewin, 2009) during the symposium. The role of digital technologies in NZCA&RN and the influence of virtual environments on our roles and activities were discussed in some detail in a later NZCA&RN presentation during our symposium at the New Zealand Association for Research in Education (Atkins, Davis, Lamont & Pratt, 2009).

### **The conduct of the symposium**

Clearly, the symposium was an important strategy for launching NZCA&RN. It brought together action researchers from a number of different institutions to meet with each other and discuss their work. Listed below are some various parts that helped facilitate the inaugural NZCA&RN symposium:

- The early work in abstracts collection, refereeing, editing and publishing.
- Support of department personnel and the head of school too!
- Publicity budget negotiated and promised promptly.
- Extension from individual to organizational abstracts led by Waikato University and followed through by Otago University and Victoria University.
- Just in time proceedings in our hands at the start of the symposium.
- Posters on paper and on computer. The creative formats of artistic and technology-savvy scholars added richness to the communication and expanded our view of locations to be researched.
- Welcoming the diversity in all dimensions, including scholars who were new to the field of research in ways that ensured they had a voice and received mentoring by spreading experts across groups.
- Also enabling experts to voice their opinions and to debate with one another at plenary sessions.
- Strategies to avoid regrouping among lines that would decrease networking, such as avoiding grouping into phases of education and training.
- Keynote presentations starting with the indigenous perspective of Professor Angus Macfarlane, followed by an established leader in action research Professor Susan Groundwater-Smith, and
- Future planning including links with national research associations and a nationwide meeting in early 2010 that will recast Bridget Somekh's CARN keynote and link sites across New Zealand with video-conference, including the universities of Canterbury, Otago and Waikato.

### **Issues arising from the symposium:**

A number of issues emerged from both the keynote addresses and the table group discussions, among these were:

- Action research – questioning the term as methodology and its fit with becoming critical;
- Colonization and globalization through naive assumption of shared 'western' world views;
- Empowerment – a problematic term;
- Collaboration versus autonomy; and
- Perceptions of partnership.

### **Further actions to establish CA&RN in New Zealand**

For educational research networking in there should be no better place than the national conference for educational researchers and in New Zealand that was the NZARE December conference in Rotorua. Therefore immediately following our inaugural symposium Jo Fletcher led Niki Davis and Susan Groundwater-Smith to write a proposal to NZARE and for good measure to its Australian sister

organization AARE. We proposed a concurrent session linked via the Internet. Both were accepted, but in the event we could not match schedules that were a day apart, so the presentation in AARE took place on day before our NZARE symposium.

Our NZARE NZCA&RN symposium was an outstanding success with good attendance and presentations, most including stimulating images of braided rivers and the mountains that we draw from. The NZARE symposium was opened in Māori Te Reo by Angus Macfarlane who added a strong spiritual dimension with links to his local iwi, as well as emphasising the braiding of Kaupapa Māori methodologies with those related to action research and other emergent approaches that build capacity with the people who are participants in the research. Niki Davis and Keryn Pratt were able to present on the ICT dimension of NZCA&RN, which is included in a separate paper in these NZARE proceedings (Davis et al, 2010). Although the foggy weather had prevented Clare Aitkin from joining us, and internet connection and email permitted us to add her slides just before we opened the symposium. The other two papers in the symposium provided wonderful illustrations of collaborative action and research networking on an international and a local level. The University of Waikato's international action was to take action to set up new teacher education programme in the Solomon Islands (Alcorn & Cowie, 2010). Elaine Mayo, a researcher co-opted by the practitioner specialists in the University of Canterbury illustrated the value of a facilitator for collaborative research to enable collaborative reflection and action informed by research (Mayo et al, 2010), and they also provide a pathway for others potentially to adopt their methodologies and to network to increase the spread of the action and research. It is also important for us to note that there were presentations in other NZARE sessions on a range of kaupapa Maori research, including projects that had selected successful experiences of Māori for research. Melinda Webber (Webber, Macfarlane & McCrae, 2009) told us of several factors that successful Māori students in secondary schools appeared to have in common, including "Discipline, self-motivation and confidence", and "Whānau support" and she said: "All students acknowledged the consistent support they received from their whānau, who pushed them, and supported and sacrificed for their success; in return they wanted to make their whānau proud." Our vision for NZCA&RN may only be achievable by creating and nurturing similar collegial whānau support and so that is likely to be a key to the success or failure of our CARN hub / NZARE interest group.

The NZARE symposium was followed by the initial meeting of a NZCA&RN Interest Group within NZARE, which had been instigated by colleagues in the University of Waikato and supported by the NZARE Board member, Alex Gunn, who was working to establish Interest Groups within NZARE. We have already achieved the twenty-member support required by NZARE's governance. At NZARE fourteen participants shared their passion for action and research and we found two topics that appear to be promising foci for more widespread collaborative action and research networking that NZCA&RN may facilitate. These were the most popular:

- Building collaborative networks for professional voice (7 interested)
- Learning and teaching though technology (4 interested)

The NZARE NZCA&RN Interest Group meeting also returned to the puzzled of what we mean by collaborative action and research networking, and we know that we will return to that puzzle continually and through it learn more about the strengths of specific braids in our river as well as the mountains of methods from which they flow.

The meeting also enabled us to plan further our next distributed nationwide meeting in early 2010, when we will all view and comment of Bridget Somekh's keynote speech to CARN's annual conference in Athens in Europe. Angus Macfarlane's contribution to the international CARN annual conference was to give the first presentation on Kaupapa Maori research methodology and that presentation was put into context of the global and local by Bridget's keynote, which included her experience with in New Zealand this year culminating in NZCA&RN's inaugural symposium. Our viewing of that keynote aims to consolidate our collaborative action and research networking and identify ways in which our nationwide hub can do more than we could do individuals or as institutions. We will also continue the healthy debate on our assorted braided methodologies including action research.



## **Action research is not a methodology – How being critical plays a part**

In her address to the symposium, Susan Groundwater-Smith's (2009) first claim was to assert that action research is not a methodology (Carr, 2006, 2007) for it can be argued that a methodology refers to the coherent theoretical analysis of the methods that have been employed, not to the methods themselves. In action research the theoretical analysis is far more eclectic than the term 'methodology' suggests – the analyses are driven by the nature of the problems being studied and these themselves may be several. While methods are the tools that are employed to study a phenomenon, methodology applies to the principles underlying them. This assumes the possibility of an *a priori* standpoint against which the study can be judged to be efficacious or otherwise.

As Reason (2003:106) puts it:

Action research must not be seen as imply another methodology in the toolkit of disinterested social science: action research is an orientation to inquiry rather than a methodology. It has a different purpose, it is based in different relationships and it has different ways of conceiving knowledge and its relation to practice.

Action research, then, is both an orientation to inquiry and with an obligation to action. As such it does not bear the hallmarks of the technical rational aspects of positivism and empiricism where research is seen as mainly concerned with the prediction and control of practice. Instead it seeks to illuminate the local; to provide practitioners and other participants in action research such as community members with insight and understanding through forms of systematic inquiry that address issues and questions that are of significance to those concerned with human enterprises, be they in education, health care, social work or the like. At its most essential it can be said to be transformational. Elliott (1991) once defined it as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of the action within it". Griffiths (2009) takes us further in making the case for action research to enhance social justice in education through the maximisation of participation and a conscious mindfulness of what is fair and right.

Saltmarsh (2009:153) argues for context as being a 'practised' place. She asserts that in line with Kemmis (2009) and Schatzki (2002) it is vital that recognition of context provides us with the capacity to be able to understand how individuals are constructed by the social and how, in turn, the social is made by its individual members. Thus any professional practice, such as action research, exceeds its own particular ways of knowing and doing, in that it is, itself, "interwoven into the fabric of everyday life" (Saltmarsh: 157). Thus context is far more than merely a *background* to what is undertaken in the name of action research; it is a complex amalgam of social and material conditions *within* which action research takes place.

By its very nature action research is conducted in order that those who participate may engage in becoming critical of the conditions of their practice. As Evans (2007:554) argues, practice must be understood as going beyond activity, towards a fuller and richer concept as "action-full-of-thought and thought-full-of action". Bridget Somekh and others spoke of empowerment while also debating how to empower those who were not high in the hierarchy and Angus' keynote provided an example of KPM research within a school that had enabled sharing of the power with all types of participants including students and the communities supporting them. This evolved into a debate about collaboration and the development of participant researchers' autonomy.

At the same time we were aware of tensions among those who had strong notions of the importance and value of their favoured research approaches, including some who held to action research. Bridget in her recent keynote also recognizes the inevitable tension between action and research and between different approaches to research as follows:

Action research is worth defending: variations in action research, therefore, create tensions for the community. When I wrote my book on action research I believed that this tension was my

personal problem, resulting from ‘the shift in my vision and understanding over a period of 20 years’ (Somekh, 2006, p.6), but working recently on a paper about CARN’s development over 30 years I realised that the problem had been inevitable for anyone taking on, as I did, the roles of a Coordinator of CARN and an Editor of EAR over that period. CARN and EAR have always supported a range of approaches to action research:

CARN’s strength is that it promotes flexibility and tolerance and works to be inclusive of a wide range of methods and approaches which espouse action research principles. At the same time, CARN encourages wide-ranging debate and critical engagement with issues. It includes and represents variety and critique and avoids excluding and narrowing debate. (Somekh, 2010, p.qx) (Somekh, 2009b)

### **Action and research in partnership**

Engaging in action research and/or the braided river of approaches including Kaupapa Maori (KPM) approaches naturally includes a discomfort that unsettles professional certainty and requires investigation, analysis and reasoning that liberates those who practice it. But this, of course, cannot happen by chance. It requires a capacity for the systematic gathering of evidence related to a specific problem or challenge and made available for public scrutiny and debate that will allow the ways in which practitioners think and act to be more transparent than is the case when they work in the isolation of their classrooms or offices. The processes have the potential to liberate practice from its more habitual constraints – however, without forms of external support this can prove most difficult (Groundwater-Smith, 1998). Lifting the “scales from the eyes” is difficult to do alone. The academic researcher has as much to learn as the field-based practitioner and including those researched in the decision making strengthens internal validity and dissemination.

Action research in the professions, under any guise is a costly business. It is also risky business. For professionals such as teachers to plan for, enact, analyse and interpret their everyday practices, with or without academic partners demands time, intellectual commitment and resources. Few worksites, on an individual basis have the economic capacity for the kind of investment that is required. Thus it is the case that much of what is undertaken in the name of action research or facilitated practitioner inquiry (call it what you will) is necessarily underwritten by government programs, research grants or community development projects in the health and human services. On the one hand, practitioners, eager to address immediate social and educational programs will seize what is available, albeit that they may be constrained by the ways in which the funding agencies choose to define the problem setting and the conditions under which it may be investigated. On the other, the academic world, is justifiably concerned about the institutionalisation of practitioner inquiry in education, leading to it becoming no more than a form of in-service professional education “detached from any emancipatory aspirations” (Carr & Kemmis, 2005, p. 351).

KPM research has important guidance for recognizing and respecting the collective and cultural ownership of beliefs and practices that are part of the contexts in which we undertake action and research. While the Māori philosophy and world view are especially important in our increasingly bicultural nation of New Zealand, they also serve to stimulate researchers worldwide to rethink their closed view of the world and to recognize the importance of collaborative approaches, holistic approaches to knowledge, and the overarching goal of self-determination and the development of well-being (Bishop, 2005; Te Aika & Greenwood, 2009). Niki Davis and Janinka Greenwood drew on their collaborative experience with Lynne Harata Te Aika in writing together for an international audience to help others understand the gulf in communication as well as socio-historical perspectives (Greenwood, Te Aika & Davis, 2010). Our purpose was to communicate our recognition of way in which Māori are successfully building their own capacity through action and research with digital technologies, specifically KPM action and research, so that it became a message from New Zealand to support a wide range of indigenous researchers and, through them, to increase the diversity of our action and research worldwide.

Here we will continue to find a rich upwelling of dialogue and debate; for academic, for practitioner and for participant communities to learn from one another; and for action and collaboration locally and globally. Such learning will best occur when each party is prepared to respect, listen and learn from the other under circumstances that are unconstrained by established habits of mind. It is also possible to see the considerable opportunities that are available to create and build upon diverse professional and community knowledge. This is our underlying passion that underpins the formation and development of NZCA&RN – to increase the diversity of respectful and ethical action and research in our collaborative network. We recognize diverse mountains of research methodologies that mingle and nurture their world as their water flows along braided rivers, which also flows into and contribute to the oceans of our world.

## **Conclusion**

The formation of NZCA&RN has not only been a strategy for bringing like minded people together to discuss their work, it has also been a mindful means of understanding that change is better wrought when there is a determination to interrupt the ways in which human practices such as education have been commandeered and colonised in the interest of bureaucracies and their managers, the very puzzles of practice. Burns (2007) takes an interventionist stance in relation to bringing about change in complex social organizations through inquiry. He sees intervention as a form of action. He pleads for it not to be confused with ‘external meddling’, ‘social engineering’ or ‘top-down development’ (p.9) but rather as a means of interrupting systemic patterns that are dysfunctional, disabling and unjust.

Establishing NZCA&RN will provide a powerful means to unravel some of these puzzles of practice, albeit that at this point only a few of the pieces of the puzzle have been fitted together. Gozzi (1996) writes:

It is useful to have a metaphor like "puzzle" to describe an indeterminate situation. Puzzles are indeed important things. They played a role in many ancient myths, which involved having the protagonists figure out some riddle or puzzle before being allowed onto the next stage of their journey...The jigsaw puzzle itself, the cardboard-and-paper collection of differently shaped and colored pieces, is an embodied metaphor. It embodied, in physical form, a large metaphorical concept. Within limitations, it provides fruitful material for thinking about the process of solving puzzles of all kinds. You start, of course, with a large pile of randomized pieces. Thousands of them. It looks hopeless. Disorder reigns supreme.

Order is emerging as our networked learning community grows and flourishes. NZCA&RN started in May 2009 with a two day symposium of that brought a jig saw of over 20 abstracts, each of which an overview of action research related scholarly work of individuals or universities. Although we intended to make a map from our puzzle, we are happy that our puzzle remains to express the diversity and wealth of action and research in New Zealand. Instead our braided river of NZCA&RN is on the national and world map and we are learning to read the “compass”. We have been welcomed by CARN’s annual international conference at its meeting in Europe (Somekh, 2009b) and we have brought a New Zealand influence in KPM methodology and waitata sung to celebrate presentations. This paper and our presentations to the Australian Association for Research in Education and the New Zealand Association for Research in Education have plotted us on the maps of our most important research associations. At NZARE we formed a new Interest Group and this now strengthens our national research networking. This is what we did in less than a year and it promises well for the future.

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